

THE UNSTOPPABLE SPIRIT Part 3: The Church is Born

Note: This plan follows the content of Pastor Derek's podcast, "Acts Daily Devotional." You can also find this plan on YouVersion. Find more information at www.whoisgrace.com/acts

PART 3/ WEEK 6 MARYRDOM & SCATTERING

DAY 36 STEPHEN'S MARTYRDOM

Scripture: Acts 7: 51-60

Reflect: Stephen stopped teaching and started confronting. Stiff-necked people with uncircumcised hearts. The same accusation God leveled at their ancestors in Exodus. The Sanhedrin erupted, gnashing teeth, an angry mob replacing a dignified court. And in that chaos, Stephen looked up. Heaven opened. He saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God. They dragged him outside and stoned him while a young man named Saul watched and held the coats. Stephen's final prayers echoed his Master. Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. Lord, do not hold this sin against them. Then Luke uses the gentlest word possible. Stephen fell asleep. The stones were violent, but for Stephen, death became a peaceful crossing into the arms of the One waiting for him.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Reflection: The same Spirit who gave Stephen a vision of heaven in his darkest moment is available to you. When you're pressed or overwhelmed, what part of your life starts to act as if Jesus isn't actually with you, and what would change if you looked for him there?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, why must we face these struggles? How long must I suffer... But I trust in Your steadfast love and will rejoice over being welcomed into your comforting arms at the end of the day. Amen*

DAY 37 SAUL RAVAGES THE CHURCH

Scripture: Acts 8: 1-3

Reflect: Stephen's execution opened the floodgates. Occasional opposition became full-scale assault. Saul ravaged the church, a word meaning a wild animal tearing through a vineyard. House to house, dragging men and women to prison. Believers scattered throughout Judea and Samaria, but the apostles stayed in Jerusalem. Ordinary Christians carried the gospel into new territory, fleeing for their lives and arriving as missionaries. Jesus had commanded them to go to Judea and Samaria in Acts 1:8. They stayed comfortable in Jerusalem for seven chapters. God allowed an Acts 8:1 persecution to accomplish what they wouldn't do voluntarily. Saul thought he was destroying the church. He was scattering the embers.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Takeaway: God often uses the places that feel like "scattering" to position us for influence we wouldn't have chosen on our own. Think about the difficult circumstances in your life right now. Where has God scattered you? Maybe it is a job transition, a health struggle, a relocation, or a relationship that did not work out. What if that scattering is not punishment but positioning? What if God is placing you

somewhere you never would have gone voluntarily so you can carry his presence into new spaces? Ask yourself: Who has God put in my path because of my scattering that I would not have met otherwise?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I desire Your affirmation over a job well done, not Your anger kindled against me because of disobedience. I need your help today in making good decisions for my own good and to ignite the embers of someone else's faith as they see my obedience while suffering. Amen*

DAY 38 PHILIP GOSSIPS THE GOSPEL IN SAMARIA

Scripture: Acts 8: 4-8

Reflect: The scattered believers kept talking. Everywhere they went, they gossiped the gospel. Philip headed to Samaria, crossing a centuries-old boundary of hatred. Jews and Samaritans had despised each other for over a thousand years. Most Jews would add an extra day to their journey just to avoid Samaritan soil. Philip walked right in and proclaimed Jesus as Messiah. The crowds paid attention. They listened, watched signs, saw demons cast out and paralyzed people healed. The gospel broke through a millennium of distrust. The result? Great joy in that city. When the gospel crosses barriers and enemies become family, joy follows. The scattering that began with Stephen's death was already bearing fruit in unlikely soil.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Challenge: Who is your Samaria? Think of a person or group you would naturally avoid, someone whose background, beliefs, or lifestyle makes you uncomfortable. Maybe it is a coworker with different political views, a neighbor from a different culture, or someone whose life choices you disagree with. This week, take one step toward that person. It doesn't have to be dramatic. A genuine conversation, an act of kindness, an invitation to coffee. The gospel breaks barriers. Let it break one through you.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus may Your words inspire my thoughts and direct my speech with ...today. Amen*

DAY 39 SIMON THE MAGICIAN BELIEVES

Scripture: Acts 8: 9-13

Reflect: Before Philip arrived in Samaria, a magician named Simon held the city captive with sorcery. Everyone paid attention to him, calling him the Great Power of God. When Philip showed up with genuine power, the crowds shifted. To everyone's surprise, Simon himself believed and was baptized. But what exactly did he believe? Luke gives a clue. Simon followed Philip everywhere, amazed as he observed the signs and great miracles. He wasn't amazed at Jesus. He was amazed at the power. Simon saw better magic tricks, an upgrade to his business model. You can be impressed with Christianity without being transformed by Christ. You can want what Jesus offers without wanting Jesus himself.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Reflection: What draws you to Jesus? Is it the benefits he offers or is it him? The peace, the purpose, the community, the hope are all real. They're all good. But if you could have those things

without having Jesus, would you take the deal? Simon would have. That's the question worth asking. Am I following Jesus, or am I following what Jesus can do for me?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus I believe You are the Christ. Please forgive me for claiming You are my possession vs me being devotedly Yours. Transform me into Your likeness. I want You to be the living water that flows within me, mind body and soul. Amen*

DAY 40 PETER AND JOHN IN SAMARIA

Scripture: Acts 8: 14-25

Reflect: News reached Jerusalem that Samaria had received the word of God. The apostles sent Peter and John to investigate. The Samaritans had believed and been baptized, but the Spirit had not yet visibly fallen on them. When Peter and John laid hands on them, something visible happened. Simon the magician saw it and made an offer. He wanted to buy the power to give the Spirit through laying on of hands. Peter's response was fierce. May your silver be destroyed with you. Simon's heart was wrong before God, poisoned by bitterness, bound by wickedness. Simon asked Peter to pray so that nothing bad would happen to him. Afraid of consequences but never convicted of sin. Grace cannot be purchased. It can only be received.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Takeaway: Simon reveals a trap. The moment you approach God asking "What can this do for me?" instead of "Who would you have me become?" you've turned grace into currency. God doesn't upgrade your life. He transforms it. The difference between Simon and the other Samaritans wasn't baptism. It was surrender. One group let go of everything to receive something greater. Simon tried to keep everything and add Jesus to the pile. You can't negotiate with grace. You can only let it undo you.

Pause to Pray: *Christ, by Your righteousness alone can I come before You, oh Holy Son of God, and God our Father. I want my heart to be utterly transformed by You and fully devoted to You. Thank You Jesus. Amen*

DAY 41 PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN: THE ENCOUNTER

Scripture: Acts 8: 26-31

Reflect: Samaria was exploding with new believers. Then an angel showed up with strange instructions. Leave this thriving city and go to a desert road. No explanation. Philip got up and went. He found a divine appointment. An Ethiopian official, treasurer to the queen, traveling home from Jerusalem. As a eunuch, he couldn't fully participate in temple worship. Yet there he sat, still reading Isaiah, still hungry for God. The Spirit whispered to Philip: go and join that chariot. Philip ran. He arrived at exactly the right moment and heard the man reading Isaiah aloud. Do you understand what you are reading? How can I, unless someone guides me? A divine setup. One person willing to be interrupted. Another ready to receive truth.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Challenge: Ask God today to give you eyes to see the divine appointments around you. Then pay attention. The person at the coffee shop who looks troubled. The coworker who asks an unexpected question. The neighbor you keep running into. God is always ahead of his people, setting up encounters we never planned. Your job is not to manufacture conversations about faith. It is to stay sensitive to the Spirit and available when he prompts. Today, look for one person God might be putting in your path.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus You know where I am along my spiritual walk with You. Lord I am praying for the initiative to reach out and follow through with my next step of obedience as this humble eunuch and Philip did. I sit hungrily waiting for your prompt.... Amen*

DAY 42 PHILIP AND THE ETHIOPIAN: BAPTISM

Scripture: Acts 8: 32-40

Reflect: The Ethiopian was reading Isaiah 53. Philip opened his mouth and, beginning with that Scripture, told him the good news about Jesus. The suffering servant. The Lamb led to slaughter. Isaiah was pointing to Christ, and Philip connected the dots. They came to water and the Ethiopian said, Look, there is water. What would keep me from being baptized? As a eunuch, he had faced barriers his whole life. Now? Nothing kept him from belonging. They went down into the water together. When they came up, the Spirit carried Philip away. The Ethiopian looked up, his teacher was gone, but he went on his way rejoicing. Church tradition says he became a missionary to Ethiopia. One divine appointment on a desert road, and an entire continent begins to be reached.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Takeaway: The Spirit's best work often comes disguised as an interruption, so don't outrun the very moments God is sending. Philip reached an Ethiopian official because he was willing to stop on a desert road. Jesus performed many of his most significant healings when he paused for interruptions others would have ignored. Missional living isn't mostly about grand plans. It's about holy pauses, slowing down enough to notice who God has already placed in front of you. If you want to follow the steps of Jesus, you'll need to follow his stops too.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I humbly come before You. Guide me in taking a next step with You at the helm. I am listening.... I will go when You go, I will stop when You stop. Thank You Jesus Christ and King of all kings. Amen*

PART 3/ WEEK 7 SAUL'S CONVERSION

DAY 43 THE ROAD TO DAMASCUS

Scripture: Acts 9:1-9

Reflect: A young Pharisee named Saul had made it his personal mission to wipe out this new movement called the Way. Saul was breathing threats like a dragon exhaling fire, hunting Christians all the way to Damascus. Then heaven interrupted. A light brighter than the midday sun knocked him to the ground, and a voice asked the question that would rewrite the rest of his life: "Why are you persecuting me?"

The most dangerous enemy of the early church come face to face with the risen Jesus on a dusty road outside Damascus. Everything Saul believed collapsed in a single moment. His blindness became the beginning of his sight.

Saul had been spiritually blind his whole life, thinking he saw clearly while actually walking in darkness. Now his outer condition matched his inner reality. For three days he sat in darkness, not eating or drinking, processing the earthquake that had just leveled everything he thought he knew.

Here's what makes this story so encouraging: no one is too far gone. Saul was the last person anyone would have expected to become a Christian. He was the church's public enemy number one. And yet God pursued him. The same grace that stopped Saul on the Damascus Road is available to the person you've given up on. It's available to you in whatever area of resistance remains. The phrase "Damascus Road experience" has become shorthand for dramatic conversion, and while not everyone's encounter with Christ is this spectacular, the essential pattern is the same. God reveals himself to you. And everything changes.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Is there an area of your life where you've been running in the wrong direction with absolute confidence? Where your certainty might actually be blindness? Saul didn't lack conviction. He lacked sight. The scariest kind of wrong is the kind that feels righteous. Ask God to show you if there's a Damascus Road moment you've been resisting, a direction he's been trying to turn you from while you've kept charging ahead.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, where have I thought I was right, but been blind? Help me to turn and follow you in all things... Amen.*

DAY 44 ANANIAS' MISSION

Scripture: Acts 9:10-16

Reflect: Ananias is one of the unsung heroes of the New Testament. He's not an apostle. He's not a famous leader. He's just a disciple, an ordinary believer living in Damascus. And yet God chose him for one of the most significant missions in church history.

When the Lord calls his name in a vision, Ananias responds with the classic biblical formula of availability: "*Here I am, Lord.*" It's the same response Samuel gave (1 Samuel 3:4-8); the same response Isaiah gave (Isaiah 6:8). It signals readiness to obey. But then Ananias hears the assignment, and his readiness wavers.

Ananias pushes back, and who can blame him? But notice that he doesn't flat-out refuse. He expresses his concern, asks his question, and then he listens. There's a world of difference between wrestling with God in honest dialogue and simply digging in your heels. Ananias brings his fear to God rather than letting it make the decision for him.

Ananias was available to do God's will, but his hesitation is also very relatable. Sometimes God asks us to step toward people or situations that frighten us. The question isn't whether we feel afraid. The

question is whether we'll trust God anyway. Ananias did. And because he did, the church gained its greatest missionary.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Is there someone God has been prompting you to reach out to, someone your instincts tell you to avoid? Write down the name. Then take one small step today, a text, an email, a phone call, to obey before your fear builds a stronger case than your faith. Ananias didn't wait until he felt brave. He went while he was still afraid. That's what obedience looks like when God's assignment doesn't make sense yet.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, I feel you prompting me to reach out to..... Here are my questions... Help me obey you... Amen.*

DAY 45 SAUL IS BAPTIZED AND PREACHES

Scripture: Acts 9:17-22

Reflect: The first word Ananias speaks to Saul is extraordinary: "Brother." Think about that. Three days earlier, Saul was hunting Christians to imprison and kill them. And now a Christian walks in and calls him family. He approached him as a fellow member of God's household. What a model for how we should treat new believers, regardless of their past.

What happens next shows the proper sequence of a conversion. Saul gets up and is baptized, publicly identifying with the movement he had been trying to destroy. Then he takes food and regains his strength. He spent time with the disciples in Damascus, and then, almost immediately, he began proclaiming Jesus in the synagogues. The same intellectual firepower that had driven his persecution was now deployed for the gospel.

Saul's transformation was so dramatic that people couldn't process it. A changed life is one of the most powerful types of evidence for the gospel. Arguments can be debated. Philosophy can be questioned. But how do you explain a terrorist becoming a preacher?

God doesn't waste your past. He doesn't change your personality. He redeems those things. Everything Saul had learned as a Pharisee, his knowledge of Scripture, his training in argumentation, his passion and drive, was now redirected for the kingdom. The very qualities that made him a dangerous enemy made him a powerful advocate. Your background, your skills, even your mistakes can become tools in God's hands.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: The same Christ who knocks you down on the Damascus Road picks you back up with new sight and sends you right back into the world you came from, this time as his messenger. Your past isn't discarded. It's redirected. God doesn't erase what you were. He repurposes it for what you're becoming.

Pause to Pray: *Lord Jesus, help me to see how ... [personality trait] and ... [life experience] can be used by you... Amen.*

DAY 46 ESCAPE AND ACCEPTANCE

Scripture: Acts 9:23-31

Reflect: The hunter became the hunted. Saul's powerful preaching made him a marked man, and he escaped Damascus in the middle of the night, lowered through a wall in a basket like a smuggled fugitive. When he reached Jerusalem, the believers wouldn't accept him. The wounds were too fresh. Saul's conversion might have been genuine, but that didn't automatically erase the memory of what he had done. Trust takes time to rebuild, especially when the damage has been severe.

Enter Barnabas, the Son of Encouragement, who risked his own credibility to vouch for a man nobody else would trust. Barnabas saw what others couldn't see. He believed in Saul's transformation when everyone else was still afraid.

Behind many well-known servants of God are lesser-known believers who played crucial supporting roles. Barnabas didn't minister in the spotlight. But without Barnabas, Saul might never have been received by the Jerusalem church. Without Barnabas, the most prolific missionary in church history might have been sidelined by suspicion.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Is there someone in your life who needs a Barnabas, someone whose past makes people hesitate, whose reputation precedes them in all the wrong ways? Be the one who vouches for them. Introduce them. Speak up for them. Open a door they can't open themselves. Barnabas risked his own credibility to give Saul a second chance. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is loan someone your trust when theirs has run out.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, help me to be a Barnabas to ... Show me what I can do to advocate for them.*

DAY 47 PETER HEALS AENEAS

Scripture: Acts 9:32-35

Reflect: Peter was traveling from place to place, and the phrase suggests a deliberate pastoral circuit. Luke introduces us to Aeneas, a man paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. Eight years. I want you to notice how Peter frames the healing: "Aeneas, Jesus Christ heals you." Not "I heal you" or "Watch what I can do." Peter is crystal clear about the source of the power. Jesus Christ is the healer. Peter is just the instrument, a vessel through which the power flows.

This healing resulted in all who lived in Lydda and Sharon turning to the Lord. There is evangelistic purpose behind the miraculous. The miracle confirms the message. Aeneas walking around was a living testimony to the power of Jesus Christ. One man healed, but an entire region converted.

Here's a principle worth noting: God often works through small beginnings to achieve large outcomes. Peter dealt with one man, but many turned to the Lord. We tend to measure significance by scale: bigger is better, more is superior. But God measures differently. One divine appointment can become a tipping point. One act of obedience can trigger a wave of response. Don't despise the day of small

things. The person you pray for, the neighbor you serve, the coworker you share your story with, you have no idea what God might do through that single encounter.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Where has God been at work in your life, bringing healing, restoration, or breakthrough, and who needs to know about it? Not for your glory, but for his? Aeneas got up and made his bed, and an entire region turned to the Lord. Your testimony isn't just for you. It's ammunition for someone else's faith. Who's waiting to hear that Jesus is still in the healing business? Tell them what he's done. Let your life become someone else's reason to believe.

Pause to Pray: *God, where have you been working in my life? Who needs to hear it? Give me courage to tell them... Amen.*

DAY 48 PETER RAISES DORCAS

Scripture: Acts 9:36-43

Reflect: Tabitha, also called Dorcas, was "always doing good works and acts of charity." Both her Aramaic name (Tabitha) and her Greek name (Dorcas) mean "gazelle," perhaps suggesting her energetic service. Luke makes clear that this woman's faith expressed itself in practical action. She made robes and clothes for widows, the most vulnerable members of society. In a culture without social safety nets, widows often faced destitution. Dorcas met their needs with her needle and thread. She was like an ancient Mother Teresa.

When she died, the community was devastated. A room full of grieving women held up the robes she had stitched for them, displaying evidence of love. Peter knelt, prayed, and spoke two words: "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes.

One woman's life and restoration became a catalyst for citywide faith. Because the result was evangelistic: "throughout Joppa... many believed in the Lord."

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: A life spent in humble service, doing small things faithfully, a needle and thread for widows, can echo louder in eternity than you'll ever know on earth. Dorcas never preached a sermon, but her funeral became one. Ordinary faithfulness in invisible moments builds the kind of credibility that makes resurrection worth believing. God doesn't waste quiet obedience.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, help me to see my ordinary faithfulness in ... as part of your eternal plan... Amen.*

DAY 49 CORNELIUS' VISION

Scripture: Acts 10:1-8

Reflect: The conversion of Cornelius is the final stage in the salvation-drama that has been unfolding since Pentecost: first Jerusalem, then Samaria, then the Ethiopian eunuch, and now a Roman centurion. The gospel is about to burst through its last ethnic barrier.

Cornelius was a centurion, a Roman military officer commanding about a hundred soldiers in the Italian Regiment. These were typically men of character, discipline, and often surprising openness to spiritual things. Luke describes Cornelius as "devout" and "God-fearing." This technical term refers to Gentiles who had attached themselves to Judaism without fully converting. For Cornelius, things were about to get interesting. God saw his seeking heart.

At the hour of afternoon prayer, about three o'clock, Cornelius had a vision. An angel appeared and spoke his name. But notice the angel doesn't preach the gospel to Cornelius directly. Instead, he tells him to send for Peter. Why? Because God delights to use ordinary people to carry his extraordinary message.

So, Cornelius responded immediately. No hesitation. No second-guessing. When God speaks, obedience follows. The same should be true for us. Too often we receive clear direction, but then we delay, analyze, or negotiate. Cornelius shows us a better way: hear, respond, obey.

Here's the big picture: God is always ahead of his people. He's already working in Cornelius before Peter knows anything about it. The Spirit is preparing hearts, orchestrating circumstances, and removing obstacles before we ever show up. Our job isn't to make things happen. It's to show up where God is already moving.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Cornelius didn't wait for clarity. He moved on what he had. Is there something God has already spoken to you about, something you've been waiting to fully understand before you act? Obedience doesn't require a complete map. It requires a next step. What's the one thing you know to do right now, even if you don't yet see how it connects to the bigger picture? Do that. God reveals the rest in motion, not in hesitation.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, give me courage to take a next step in... Amen.*

PART 3/ WEEK 8 BREAKING BARRIERS

DAY 50 PETER'S VISION

Scripture: Acts 10: 9-16

Reflect:

Peter was hungry, praying on a rooftop in Joppa, when a sheet descended from heaven filled with animals no devout Jew would ever touch. A voice commanded: "Kill and eat." Peter's response is almost

instinctive: "No, Lord!" Three times the vision repeated. Three times God replied: "What I have made clean, do not call impure."

The vision is doing something deeper than overturning dietary law. The food distinctions and the people distinctions were always linked. Over the centuries, this sense of holy separation had curdled into something God never intended: ethnic and religious superiority. That's the wall this vision is demolishing. The unclean animals on that sheet are not just animals. They are a picture of every person Peter has been trained to consider outside the reach of God. And God is telling him, I've already declared them clean. Your job is not to question that. Your job is to trust it.

This is the real conversion happening in Acts 10. John Stott described it plainly: the conversion in Acts 10 isn't just Cornelius turning to Christ. It's Peter being converted from his prejudice. This tendency toward prejudice runs deep in all of us. The word prejudice is just a combination of two words: pre and judge. To pre-judge is to make sweeping conclusions without sufficient information. This prejudice eventually becomes the seedbed of bigotry and exclusion. How do we counteract it? The same way Peter did. We let God's voice override our categories. We allow the Spirit to challenge assumptions we didn't even know we had. God doesn't use half-measures when he wants to move us. He sent the vision three times. He wasn't going to let Peter miss it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Peter's "No, Lord!" revealed how deeply his cultural conditioning ran, even after three years with Jesus. Peter had walked with Jesus, preached at Pentecost, and seen thousands saved. And he still had walls. What categories do you hold that might be more cultural than biblical? Is there a person or a group you instinctively pull away from, avoid, or judge as less likely to belong to God? Ask the Spirit to show you the wall. Because the same God who said "what I have made clean, you will not call unclean" is still saying it.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, where is my wall up? Help me to see ...[person/group] with your eyes... Amen.*

DAY 51 THE MESSENGERS ARRIVE

Scripture: Acts 10:17-23

Reflect: While Peter stood on the rooftop trying to make sense of the vision, three men knocked at the gate below. Cornelius's messengers had been delayed, stopping to ask directions through the streets of Joppa. Had they arrived a few minutes earlier, Peter would have had no framework for why Gentile strangers were on his porch. Providence doesn't always look like a miracle. Sometimes it looks like getting a little lost on the way.

Peter went downstairs. He introduced himself. He heard their report about Cornelius. The vision on the rooftop hadn't fully landed yet. In fact, Peter still didn't know exactly what it meant, but he was already believing his way to the answer. Obedience showed up before understanding did.

God moves first. That's the pattern in these chapters, and it's the pattern of the whole book of Acts. By the time Peter made his decision, the story was already well underway. He wasn't authoring God's mission. His job was to recognize when God was at work and say yes.

That's a different kind of faith than most of us practice. We tend to think the initiative belongs to us, that we identify the need, make the plan, ask God to bless it, and go. But the Spirit's pattern is to move ahead of us and then invite us into what He's already doing. God is already at work in the lives of people around you. The question is whether you're paying attention, and whether you're willing to follow when He says go. Living on mission is just joining the conversation God is already having with that person.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Peter moved toward people he didn't understand, in a direction he hadn't planned, because the Spirit said go. Today, pay attention to whoever shows up unexpectedly in your path, a name that keeps coming to mind, a conversation that feels prompted, a door that opens without you pushing on it. Those moments are rarely coincidences. Ask the Spirit if He's the one who sent them. Then take the step Peter took: go downstairs.

Pause to Pray: *Spirit, help me to pay attention to the unexpected things in my path and to enter them without understanding, just like Peter did. Amen.*

DAY 52 PETER MEETS CORNELIUS

Scripture: Acts 10:24-33

Reflect: After a thirty-mile journey, Peter arrived at Cornelius's door and faced a choice. He knew that stepping over that threshold meant answering for it back in Jerusalem. He stepped through anyway. Inside, a Roman centurion fell at his feet, and Peter pulled him up: "Stand up. I'm just a man." Then he named the elephant in the room, the centuries-old prohibition against Jews entering Gentile homes, and told them what God had done to bring him through that door.

The restriction came from centuries of man-made tradition, a cultural fence the rabbis had built around the law to keep Israel separate from surrounding nations. The fence had its roots in something good, God's call to be holy, distinct, set apart. But by the time of Acts, the fence had become the point. Separation had been elevated above mission. And God had never intended for that to be the outcome.

Peter admits all of this openly. He had been raised with this wall. He believed it was faithfulness. God had shown him otherwise. When the voice of God and the voice of tradition point in opposite directions, the traditions have to give way. Peter could stand in that Gentile living room and say it plainly because the Spirit had already done significant work in him over the past four days.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Our man-made traditions often misrepresent the true heart of God. Peter had to unlearn things he'd absorbed since childhood. He had to let God's voice override his cultural conditioning. Peter moved through stages most of us recognize: avoidance, tolerance, acceptance, and finally what the New Testament actually calls us to, intentional inclusion. You're not just called to tolerate the people outside your circle, you're called to move toward them. The people you've been taught to avoid might be exactly the people God is calling you toward. When God says someone is his child, our job isn't to debate it. It's to welcome them.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, help me to welcome ...as your child... Amen.*

DAY 53 PETER'S SERMON TO GENTILES

Scripture: Acts 10:34-43

Reflect: *"Now I truly understand that God doesn't show favoritism."* Peter opened his mouth in a Roman centurion's living room and admitted, in real time, that he'd just figured something out. After a lifetime of assuming God had favorites, the fog finally lifted. What followed was the first full gospel sermon ever preached to a purely Gentile audience: Jesus is Lord of all, he went about doing good, they killed him on a tree, God raised him on the third day, and everyone who believes receives forgiveness of sins. Everyone.

This word is critical even today. Most of us would never identify ourselves as prejudiced people. But the research is sobering. Our judgments are biased far more than we think they are, often in ways we can't see. Peter had a beautiful relationship with God and still had a blind spot about people, and he was praying on a rooftop when God had to correct him. Devotion and bias can coexist in the same heart. So, the Spirit often surfaces what we can't see on our own.

Peter is clear; forgiveness isn't earned through ancestry, ethnic identity, or religious ritual. It comes through faith in Jesus alone. Peter had walked into that house with a lifetime of categories about who was in and who was out, and the gospel he preached demolished every one of them. The ground is level at the foot of the cross, and it always has been.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Peter said, "Now I truly understand." I want you to see the timing. His understanding came *through* obedience, not *before* it. He had to step into Cornelius's home before he fully grasped what God was doing. Is there an area of your faith where you're waiting to fully understand before you obey? What might change if you took the step first and trusted understanding to follow?

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, I'm waiting to understand....Help me take a step first and trust you before all my questions are answered... Amen.*

DAY 54 THE SPIRIT FALLS ON GENTILES

Scripture: Acts 10:44-48

Reflect: God didn't wait for the altar call. The moment Peter spoke the words "forgiveness of sins," the Holy Spirit fell on every Gentile in the room. The six Jewish believers who'd come with Peter were stunned. They watched it happen: tongues, worship, the unmistakable evidence of God's presence landing on uncircumcised people who had never set foot in a synagogue. It was the Gentile Pentecost, the third great outpouring in Acts, and it shattered the last ethnic barrier standing between the gospel and the world.

The purpose was two-fold; to authenticate the salvation of these Gentiles and to signal unmistakably to the Jewish believers watching that the Gentile mission carried God's full endorsement. The Spirit didn't fall in a partial or modified way. It was the same gift, the same evidence, the same overwhelming

inundation. There was no tiered membership in this kingdom. The door was open all the way. The Spirit is still doing this. He moves ahead of our categories, crosses boundaries we've drawn around ourselves, and shows up in places and people we didn't anticipate. Our job, like Peter's, is to recognize what God has already done and refuse to withhold the welcome.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: The Jewish believers with Peter had to accept that God was doing something they hadn't anticipated. He was including people they hadn't planned for. Today, ask yourself: Is there someone in my life whose faith I've doubted because it doesn't look like mine? Someone whose journey to Jesus took a different path? Reach out to that person. Affirm their faith. Recognize that the Spirit moves in ways we don't always expect. If God has accepted them, our job is to welcome them, not to question them.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, help me to welcome... and accept them even though they are different from me... Amen.*

DAY 55 PETER EXPLAINS HIS ACTIONS – PART 1

Scripture: Acts 11:1-10

Reflect: Peter returned to Jerusalem expecting a welcome. He got a trial. "You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them." The circumcision party wasn't interested in what happened to Cornelius's household. They went straight for the social offense: a Jewish man at a Gentile table. Peter responds with pastoral wisdom. He doesn't pull rank or get defensive. He just tells the story step by step, including his own resistance. He wanted his critics to know he'd carried the same walls they were carrying. And God had refused to leave him there. The overcoming of prejudice is slow, sometimes painful. God was patient and persistent, working on Peter across days, not demanding instant transformation but not relenting either. He tends to work the same way in us.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: When God gets your attention, pay attention. Peter told the Jerusalem church that the vision happened three times. God was issuing a summons, and He wasn't about to let Peter miss it. I've found that when God keeps bringing something up in my life, through my bible reading, through circumstances, through other believers, it's precisely something I need to hear. Repeated messages usually means He's trying to get your attention. So, if you keep bumping into the same conviction, the same challenge, the same invitation, pay attention. God doesn't nag. But he does persist. And he expects us to obey.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, what are you bringing to my attention?...*

DAY 56 PETER EXPLAINS HIS ACTIONS – PART 2

Scripture: Acts 11:11-18

Reflect: Peter built his case layer by layer: the vision, the messengers, the Spirit's command, six witnesses, Cornelius's angel, and then the moment the Holy Spirit fell on the Gentiles "just as on us at the beginning." His closing question silenced the room: "How could I possibly hinder God?" The critics became worshipers. "So then, God has given repentance resulting in life even to the Gentiles." The word "even" reveals just how unexpected this was. They hadn't imagined God would move this way. Faced with the evidence, they had the humility to let go of what they thought they knew.

The question for any generation of believers is whether they're willing to keep up with where God is going, or whether they'll keep building fences around territory where God has moved in the past. God moves ahead of his people. He opens doors no one planned for, includes people no one expected, and then waits to see if the church will follow Him. Peter's story didn't just change the trajectory of one household in Caesarea. It changed the trajectory of the entire Gentile mission, the mission that eventually reached every one of us. We are sitting inside the answer to Peter's question. How could I possibly hinder God? The answer, it turns out, is that you can't.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Let's come back to Peter's question, "How could I possibly hinder God?" Where in your life might you be resisting what God is clearly doing? It might be a relationship you've been reluctant to pursue, a community you've been slow to embrace, or a change you keep stalling on. What would it look like to stop standing in the way and start moving with what the Spirit has already set in motion?

Pause to Pray: *Holy Spirit, how do I move out of the way and start moving with you?...*

PART 3/ WEEK 9 THE CHURCH EXPANDS

DAY 57 THE GOSPEL SPREADS TO ANTIOCH

Scripture: Acts 11:19-21

Reflect: Remember Acts 8? The persecution that erupted after Stephen's death sent believers fleeing Jerusalem in every direction. At the time, it must have felt like catastrophe. But God was doing something no one expected. He was using the very thing meant to destroy the church to spread it.

Those scattered believers were fleeing yes, but they were fleeing as missionaries. Everywhere they went, they told people about Jesus. They traveled north along the coast to Phoenicia, sailed to Cyprus, and pushed all the way to Antioch, some 300 miles from Jerusalem. At first, these scattered believers spoke "to no one except Jews." They were still operating within their comfort zone. Jews talking to Jews about the Jewish Messiah. That made sense. It was safe. It was expected. But then some unnamed believers from Cyprus and Cyrene did something unprecedented. They started speaking to Greeks. Gentiles. Pagans. People who worshipped idols and ate food offered to those idols and had never heard of Moses or the prophets.

The same gospel that transformed Jewish fishermen in Galilee was transforming Greek pagans in Antioch. The message wasn't watered down, it wasn't intellectualized or made more palatable. It just needed to be spoken. These ordinary believers told the simple story of Jesus, and God did what only God can do. He changed hearts.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: These unnamed believers had no official credentials, no formal training, no permission slip from the apostles. They just had a Jesus story and the courage to tell it. Is there an assignment you've been hesitating to accept from God because you don't feel qualified? A conversation you've avoided because you're not sure you have the right words? A step of obedience you've postponed until you feel more prepared? What if God is less interested in your credentials and more interested in your willingness?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I feel very ordinary. Unprepared, nervous, insecure... But I am willing! Fill me with courage to tell your story... Amen.*

DAY 58 BARNABAS & SAUL IN ANTIOCH

Scripture: Acts 11:22-26

Reflect: Word travels fast when God is moving. "Have you heard what's happening in Antioch? Regular people are sharing Christ with pagans, and they're all meeting together, Jews and Gentiles, in one church!" Alarms went off. The Jerusalem church had just worked through the Cornelius situation, but this was something else entirely. They needed to send someone to investigate. The question was: Who?

Some might have come to Antioch looking for problems. Looking for theological errors or cultural compromises. Looking for reasons to shut this thing down or at least bring it under control. But when Barnabas arrived, he saw that God was moving. "*When he arrived and saw the grace of God, he was glad.*"

But the work in Antioch was growing beyond what one person could handle. Barnabas needed help. And he knew exactly where to find it. He traveled about 100 miles to Tarsus to find Saul. Together, Barnabas and Saul spent an entire year teaching in Antioch. A full year of foundational instruction. They were digging in for the long haul and making disciples. They were building a church that could stand on its own, led by its own leaders, sustained by its own resources, and driven by its own mission.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's CHALLENGE: Barnabas's gift was seeing what God was doing and celebrating it. This week, practice being a "*Son or Daughter of Encouragement.*" I want to challenge you to identify one person in your life who is stepping out in faith, trying something new for God, or simply persevering through difficulty. Write them a note, send them a text, or pull them aside and tell them specifically what you see God doing in their life. See if your words don't just put some courage into them. That's what it means to encourage, after all.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, thank you for brothers and sisters, fellow Christians who have encouraged me, challenged me, guided me. Please bring a person to my mind... Give me the words of encouragement to say... Amen*

DAY 59 FAMINE RELIEF

Scripture: Acts 11:27-30

Reflect: The Antioch church was made up largely of Gentile converts. The Jerusalem church was almost entirely Jewish. There were cultural tensions, theological questions, centuries of mutual suspicion between Jews and Gentiles. And the famine that was coming would affect Antioch too. They could have easily justified focusing on their own needs. But they didn't.

Here's how Luke describes it, *"Each of the disciples, according to his ability, determined to send relief."* So, this wasn't a top-down mandate from the leaders. It was spontaneous, voluntary, proportional. Each person gave what they could. No pressure. No arm-twisting. No guilt trips. Just grace-fueled generosity flowing naturally from people who understood that they were part of something bigger than themselves.

This is the church at its best. Not just gathered for worship and teaching, but scattered to meet needs. Not just building community internally, but expressing that community in practical, sacrificial ways outside the walls of the church. The young Gentile congregation was learning to be the body of Christ by caring for their distant Jewish brothers and sisters in their time of need.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's TAKEAWAY: Generous people don't wait until the crisis passes to share. They give into the uncertainty, trusting that God will provide. The Antioch church gave knowing famine was coming for them too. Is there a need you've been waiting to respond to until you feel more secure? What would it look like to give from your "not quite enough" rather than waiting for your "more than enough"?

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, generosity is hard sometimes! I want to give, but I want to hold on... May your Spirit help me let go, be generous, and sacrifice... May it be for your glory, Amen.*

DAY 60 JAMES KILLED, PETER IMPRISONED

Scripture: Acts 12:1-5

Reflect: Any thinking person has to grapple with God's plan. The same God who would soon deliver Peter from prison allowed James to be executed. There's no explanation given. No theological justification offered. Luke simply records it and moves on. This is hard. It's supposed to be hard. The early church didn't have a guarantee of safety. Neither do we.

While Peter sat in maximum security, the church did the only thing they could do. They gathered up in someone's living room, and they prayed. *"The church was praying fervently to God for him."* They prayed without ceasing. They prayed through the night. They prayed knowing that their last fervent prayers hadn't saved James.

This is what true faith looks like. When the outcome is uncertain. You pray anyway. You bring your requests to God even when you've just experienced devastating loss. You keep asking, keep seeking, keep knocking, even when the last door stayed shut. Prayer isn't a guarantee of the outcome we want. It's an acknowledgment that we're not in control and the One who is can be trusted.

James died. Peter was imprisoned. The church prayed. And God was about to move in a way no one expected.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's REFLECTION: Imagine being part of that early church. You had just lost one of your key leaders, James. Your prayers hadn't prevented his death. And yet you kept praying for Peter. What does your prayer life look like after disappointment? When God doesn't answer the way you hoped, do you keep bringing your requests to him, or do you pull back? Is there something you've stopped praying for because the last time felt like a "no"?

Pause to Pray: *Lord, I know you hear every prayer, but I confess that I stopped praying for.... I'm discouraged. I'm tired of waiting. I'm scared you'll say no... But I know that You are in control and I choose to trust You and You alone... Amen.*

DAY 61 PETER'S MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

Scripture: Acts 12:6-11

Reflect: Peter was sleeping. Let's ponder that for a second. This is the night before his scheduled execution, and he's sound asleep. This isn't the restless sleep of exhaustion. This is the peace that passes understanding. Peter had learned in his years of following Jesus, that his life was in God's hands, and if God wanted him to live, no chain or soldier could stop him. And if God wanted him to die, he'd die. Either way, he could sleep.

But notice that Peter didn't just sit in his cell and wait for God to do something. When the angel said "get up," he got up. When the angel said "follow me," he followed. The miracle required his participation. The chains didn't fall off until he stood up. The gate didn't open until he walked toward it. There's a partnership here between divine power and human obedience.

This is the pattern throughout Acts. God moves. People respond. God opens doors. People walk through them. The unstoppable Spirit of God advances the mission of Jesus through ordinary people who are willing to get up and follow when the angel pokes them in the rib cage and says, "It's time."

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Takeaway: Peter slept peacefully the night before his execution because he knew his life was in God's hands. What's keeping you awake? What situation feels so out of control that you can't rest? Peter's peace didn't come from knowing how things would turn out. It came from knowing who held his future. Tonight, before you go to bed, name the thing that's stealing your peace and consciously place it in God's hands. Then sleep like Peter slept.

Pause to Pray: Psalm 4:8, CSB- *"I will both lie down and sleep in peace, for you alone, Lord, make me live in safety"... Amen.*

DAY 62 PETER AT MARY'S HOUSE

Scripture: Acts 12:12-19

Reflect: Where do you go when you've just escaped from maximum security prison in the middle of the night? Peter knew exactly where. He headed straight to a house where he knew people would be awake. People would be praying. He headed to his small group.

The church prays. God answers. Peter is free. But those who oppose God's purposes find that they cannot win. Every attempt to crush the church only leads to greater loss for the oppressor. Herod thought he was in control. He wasn't even close.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Challenge: The believers prayed all night for Peter but didn't believe God when he answered. Is there something you've been praying for that you've actually stopped expecting God to do? Today, take a moment to remember a forgotten prayer. Write down one request you've given up on. Then pray it again, and keep your eyes peeled for the answer. Pay attention this week. God might be knocking.

Pause to Pray: *Jesus, I need to pray for... May your Spirit prompt me to keep on praying... Amen.*

DAY 63 HEROD'S DEATH

Scripture: Acts 12:20-25

Reflect: Peter escaped. The church celebrated. Herod was furious. He was about to learn something that every enemy of God's people eventually discovers. The Jewish historian Josephus also recorded this event, confirming Luke's account with additional details. Herod put on a robe made entirely of silver. When the morning sun hit him, he was dazzling, almost blinding. The crowd, wanting to flatter their king, shouted that his voice was divine. And Herod, rather than deflecting the praise, absorbed it. He accepted worship that belonged only to God.

The judgment was immediate. An angel of the Lord struck him. The reason Luke gives is devastating in its simplicity: "because he did not give the glory to God." That's it. Herod's sin wasn't primarily that he killed James or imprisoned Peter. It was that he accepted worship. He let people call him a god and didn't correct them. He took for himself what belongs to God alone.

Luke doesn't end the chapter with Herod's death. That's not the main point. He ends with a progress report: "But the word of God flourished and multiplied." There it is. The contrast that runs through all of Acts. At the beginning of this chapter, James is dead, Peter is imprisoned, and Herod is powerful. At the end, Peter is free, Herod is dead, and the word of God is spreading. Opposition to the gospel doesn't stop it. It often accelerates it.

What might a step of ORDINARY OBEDIENCE look like today?

Today's Reflection: Herod's downfall came because he refused to give glory to God. Most of us will never accept worship from a crowd, but we're still tempted to take credit that belongs to God. When something goes well in your life, when you accomplish something significant, when people praise you, where does your heart go? Do you deflect the praise upward, or do you quietly absorb it? Ask God to

show you one area where you've been keeping glory that belongs to him. Then find a way today to redirect that praise back to its source.

Pause to Pray: *Lord, I'm good at... I have received recognition for... I know that my talents, abilities, and gifts come from You. They are a gift of grace from my Creator and King. Thank you! I want my whole life to bring You glory... Amen.*

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